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FCC proposes web-safety education rules

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FCC proposes web-safety education rules

e-Rate applicants would have to certify that they are teaching students about internet safety, according to a new Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

By Laura Devaney, Senior Editor

Primary Topic Channel: [eRate](#) , [Safety & security](#)

Schools and libraries receiving federal e-Rate funding would have to submit proof that they have implemented internet safety education programs along with their e-Rate applications, according to a new Notice of Proposed Rulemaking issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on Nov. 5.

When the Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act passed in Congress late last year, it included a provision requiring schools to educate their students about safe and appropriate online behavior (see "[Schools soon required to teach web safety](#)"), but lawmakers issued no immediate guidance to enforce that provision.

According to the FCC's notice, the public will have 30 days to comment on the proposed e-Rate changes, with an additional period for submitting responses to follow.

"The internet is an extremely important educational tool for students," said Robert McDowell, FCC commissioner, in a statement.

But because children use the internet so extensively both at home and at school, "it is imperative that they be educated regarding the dangers that they may encounter online. Schools can play a critical role in supplementing this education," he added.

McDowell said he is looking forward to reading public comments on the issue.

Specifically, the FCC proposes revising the rules governing the e-Rate application process to ensure compliance with the Protecting Children Act by adding a new certification requirement for all K-12 schools receiving e-Rate funding.

In addition to the existing Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) certification requirements, applicants would have to certify that they are, "as part of [their] internet safety policy, ...educating minors about appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking web sites and in chat rooms and cyber bullying awareness and response."

Schools and libraries that receive e-Rate funding would have to file this certification with their Form 486 beginning with the 2010 program year. The filing window for the 2010 program year is expected to open next month.

"Schools may, however, require additional time to amend their internet safety policies and implement procedures to comply with the new requirements after the completion of this rulemaking proceeding," the NPRM says. Congress did not set a timeframe for implementing the new certification, and the public is invited to comment on that as well.

The FCC notice also seeks comment on a proposal to revise some of the language in the CIPA certification text. These revisions would ensure that the definitions of elementary and secondary schools are consistent throughout the text, and that the certification applies to school boards as well. In addition, the revisions would specify that an applicant's technology-protection measures must be operational during any use of computers with internet access, and that they can be disabled by an authorized person, during adult use only, to enable access for bona fide research or other lawful

purpose (consistent with the original CIPA statute).

The FCC's proposed rulemaking would require schools to produce their internet safety policies upon request, and it seeks comment on the manner in which those policies should be made available and how burdensome that task might be.

"I think it's great--it's a big step forward in keeping kids safe online," said Judi Westberg Warren, president of internet safety educator Web Wise Kids, about the proposed new rules.

Westberg Warren said she thinks many schools already are moving forward in this direction.

"I don't think they'll find [the requirements] surprising or daunting," she added. "There are lots of good programs out there, ours and others, which are already based on research and created for kids and for quick and efficient implementation." She said schools also can create their own programs.

Westberg Warren said she hopes schools will look to Web Wise Kids for guidance as they create their internet safety programs.

"We've been using computer games to teach internet safety in schools for years, and we are ready to implement them easily and quickly, and we're eager for this," she said.

Under existing program rules, to be eligible for e-Rate funding, schools and libraries must certify that they have internet safety policies and technology protection measures in place in accordance with CIPA.

CIPA requires that schools' internet safety policies include technology-protection measures that prevent adults and children from accessing the internet when such access will subject users to obscene images, child pornography, or--when minors are using the internet--materials that are harmful to minors.

Schools and libraries also must show that they are monitoring minors' online activities. e-Rate applicants declare their CIPA certifications annually on their Form 486 application, the same form that the NPRM suggests will include the new certification requirement.

Links:

[Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#)

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